

Adas Israel Synagogue
Originally at the S. E. corner of 6th & G Sts., N.W.,
moved to N.E. corner of 3d & G Sts., N.W.
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-173

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS NO. DC-173

ADAS ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE

Location: Originally S.E. corner 6th & G Sts., moved to
N.E. corner of 3d and G sts., Washington, D.C.

Latitude: 38° 53' 53" north.

Longitude: 77° 01' 12" west.

Present Owner: D. M. and L. Gatti, exrs. & trs.

Present Occupancy Vacant.
and Use:

Brief Statement The first synagogue built in the District of
of Significance: Columbia.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The Joint Committee on Landmarks has designated the old Adas Israel Synagogue a Category 11 Landmark of importance which contributes significantly to the cultural heritage and visual history of the District of Columbia. The building was the first synagogue erected in the District of Columbia. This significant link with Jewish beginnings in the Nation's Capital should be preserved.

The history of the Adas Israel Congregation dates back to the years immediately following the Civil War. When the first Hebrew Congregation organized in Washington instituted certain liturgical reforms, the more conservative members withdrew and established the Adas Israel Congregation in 1869.

During its early years, the Adas Israel Congregation, composed of thirty-five families, met and worshipped in the homes of its members or in rented quarters. On August 16, 1870, the congregation's trustees recorded in the deed as Manasses Oppenheimer, L. Abraham Nathan Gotthelf and Leopold Oppenheimer purchased the property at 6th and G Streets, N.W. Construction of the synagogue was begun in 1873. Max Kleinman was the draughtsman and J. William and Company, the contractor. The dedication ceremony on June 9, 1876,

was attended by President Ulysses S. Grant, Vice-President Ferry, and other federal and civic officials.

The building was in continual use as a synagogue until 1907 when Adas Israel moved to larger quarters at 6th and I Streets, N.W. The property was sold to Steven Gatti in 1905 and remained in the Gatti family until 1968. After Adas Israel moved out, the building was used as the Greek Orthodox Church of St. Sophia (now on Massachusetts Avenue) and then by the evangelical Church of God. From 1946 until recently, a carry-out shop, market and barbershop have occupied the ground floor of the building, while the synagogue area on the second floor has served primarily as a storeroom.

The building, now owned by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, is threatened by the proposed subway line and must be moved if it is to be preserved. A joint Committee of the Adas Israel Congregation (now at Connecticut and Porter Streets, N.W.) and the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington has been working with Federal and District government agencies in an effort to move the building to a new site and restore it as a museum and headquarters for the Society. A tentative relocation site at the N. E. corner of 3rd and G Streets, N.W. has been selected and awaits final approval from the Federal Bureau of Public Roads which originally provided 90% of the purchase price of the land under the Federal Highway Act.*

2. Date of erection: 1873-1876.

B. Sources of information:

Secondary and published sources: The Daily Critic, The Washington Chronical, Evening Star, all of June 10, 1896.

The Washington Post, August 8, 1903.

The Record, Publication of the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, Volume 3, Nos. 1 & 3, March & November 1968.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

*reproduced through the courtesy of Nancy C. Taylor, Landmarks Historian, National Capital Planning Commission.

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest and merit: The District of Columbia has made this building a district landmark. It is a simple structure of great historical interest. Also a National Register property.
2. Condition of fabric: This building is in poor condition with most of the second floor in its original state. However, the first floor has been modernized greatly.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 25'0" X 62'4"; 3 bays by 4 bays; 2 stories; rectangular in shape.
2. Wall construction, finish and color: The walls are masonry bearing and made of brick. They are painted red with light green trim. The first story of the west wall is painted bluish green, which is not the original color.

The east (rear) wall has in its center a cantilevered semi-cylindrical apse, made of wood (painted green) which extends from ceiling level of first story to the top of the window level. The apse has a semi-conical roof covered with what appears to be sheet metal painted black.

The south wall is partially covered with stucco facing, indicating where an adjoining building was once located.

In the center of the west wall above the window is a semicircular stone panel trimmed in brick headers with inscriptions in Hebrew and English. The English inscription reads: "ERECTED 5636."

3. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: The entrance has a cast-iron stairway leading up one half story. There are five 8" risers; the treads are 11" deep with 1" nosing. The stairway is approx. 4' wide with an iron railing.
4. Chimneys: There is a chimney one quarter of the way on the south wall that is brick with stucco facing above the roof line. A chimney rests on the north wall and is inversely opposite the south wall chimney.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance to the building is on the west wall and is raised one half story. The opening measures 4'0" X 7'5" and has wood moulded trim.

There are wood double doors measuring 2' X 7'5" and having two vertical wood moulded panels. Above the door moulding is detailed brickwork forming a segmental arch. The doors and entrance definitely appear to be original.

There is another entrance at ground level on the west wall. The door measures 3'0" X 7'4" and is trimmed in wood moulding. This doorway is part of the modern store front and is probably recent. On the north wall is an entrance of the same dimensions and which also leads into the modern first story.

On the east wall of the building at the first story is a doorway which is now boarded up. This doorway measures 3'4" X 7'5" and has segmented brickwork at the top.

- b. Windows and shutters: The first floor was once occupied by a commercial business and now shows the still remaining modern glass front.

The three bay wide west wall has a tall, narrow, double-hung window in each bay. Each window has four tiers of lights, is trimmed in wood moulding, and has a wooden sill at its base. The top of the window is semicircular in shape, resembling a wooden fan. The center window is slightly wider than the other two with four lights in its top half and three lights in its bottom half.

Above each window are brick hood moulds which flank down one quarter of the window on either side.

On the south wall, there are four unevenly spaced double-hung windows (typical of north wall). The windows (4/4) are identical, save the window on the far left which is narrower (2/2) than the others.

The east wall has two rectangular windows at the first story level which are boarded up. These windows have segmented brickwork at the top. In addition, there are two narrow windows identical to those on the west wall and located in the left and right bays, flanking the apse, previously mentioned.

Above the apse is a small square window in the center of the wall. This window has brick trim which is segmented at the top.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is gabled with returning corners on the west wall. It is covered with sheet metal and its ridge runs east to west.
- b. Cornice: There is a simple wood moulded cornice, painted green. Under the return of the roof on the west wall is a simple brick entablature composed of a projecting brick course which is supported by a course of closely spaced brick headers.
- c. Cupola: On the roof is a metal, cylindrical-shaped cupola with a conical roof. This cupola has a rectangular vent on four sides.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: After entering from the right bay of the west wall, one finds steps, spiraling to the left, leading to the second floor where there is an entrance foyer. North of this foyer is an office, while the main area of worship is east of the foyer. Steps continue up from the foyer to the balcony which is suspended over the main area of worship. The stairway to the balcony is at its south end and is enclosed with walls. A room on the north end of the balcony corresponds to the stairway. There is an elevated platform at the east end of the building. In the southeast corner of this main area is a wood constructed lavatory with a 6'6" ceiling with a flat wooden roof. Embellished double doors in the center of the east wall open into an apse. Also, there is a trap-door in the southwest corner of the area which leads to the first floor.
2. Stairways: The interior entrance stairway leading to the second floor has ten 8" risers painted brown. This stairway is 4'0" wide and has 11" treads with 1" nosing.

The balcony stairway has sixteen risers and is 4'4" wide. The soffit of this stairway is plain and covered with black wallpaper. The railing is wood moulded and is closed with yellow wood panels. There is a 9" wood moulded baseboard painted brown which trims the steps.

There is also a 2'3" wide stairway leading to the first floor through a trap door. This stairway has twelve 9" risers and the treads are 11". There is a wood moulded handrail painted green.

The balcony railing is wood construction, has a wood moulded cap, and stands 2' tall from the balcony floor.

3. Flooring: The floor is of wood construction and was once covered with linoleum. There are wood moulded thresholds. At the east end of the building, the floor is raised 8" to form a pulpit or platform.

The floor of the balcony is wood construction also and is supported by two 4" X 4" wood moulded piers.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are plaster and covered with brown paper with white flower-like trim at the ceiling. This may be original wallpaper. There is no baseboard but a wood moulded dado board rests 4' from the floor and has wood paneling painted white. This is probably original.

The ceiling is plaster and is also covered with wallpaper, painted white. The second story ceiling is approx. 21' high, but approx. 10' from the floor of the balcony. The balcony soffit is approx. 3'2" deep. In the center of the ceiling is a large circular disk approx. 6' in diameter and projecting about 1" from the ceiling.

The first floor ceiling is covered with sheet metal which is obviously the original ceiling.

5. Doorways and doors: All interior doorways are trimmed in wood moulding. The chapel entrance doorway is 5' X 8' and has wood moulded double doors measuring 2'6" X 8'.

There is an office doorway 5' X 8' which is now open, but, because of hinges present, evidently bore double doors. This office has another smaller doorway 2'5" X 6'8" which is equipped with a moulded panel door.

The balcony doorway is 6'9" X 2'10". In addition, there is a doorway with double sliding doors that open into the apse. This is 4'4" X 8' and each door is approximately 2'2" X 8'. These doors and trim are painted white.

6. Special decorative features: In the interior of the building, on the east wall of the second floor, a doorway has embellished trim consisting of a large wood pediment having plain wood moulding that rests over the doorway. This pediment is supported by two large brackets which rest against rectangular piers or columns in high relief against the wall. These columns flank the doorway, with the wall surface under the pediment made of wood paneling painted white.

There is a 9" wood stoop to this doorway. This stoop is painted brown with 1" nosing and 1'2" deep.

7. Notable hardware: There is a 6'11" wire fence with wood framing enclosing one third of the open area of the second floor. This is evidently where a shop-owner had utilized the second floor for storage.
8. Mechanical equipment: There is a modern ventilation duct visible as well as modern plumbing and heating, mostly on the first story. There is an old light fixture above the entrance that is obviously no longer used but which is probably original.

There are four original light fixtures hung approx. 8' from the ceiling in a straight line down the center. The fixtures, those that are remaining, resemble an inverted derby with a flower-like design on the dome. This light is made of glazed translucent glass.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. General setting: This building sits on the southeast corner of 6th and G Streets, with its front facing west. All other buildings in the block have been torn down around it. Adas Israel was moved to avoid demolition in 1969; present site is N.E. corner of 3d & G Streets, N.W.
2. Outbuildings: There is a small one-story annex on either side of the front. These annexes are stuccoed and were probably used for additional space. They are adjoining the main building and have a flat roof.

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